INTRODUCTION

A Happy Year

In 511, for the first time in more than two generations, a Gallo-Roman was consul at Rome. The event would have shocked and delighted former Gallo-Roman statesmen like Sidonius Apollinaris, who had claimed decades earlier and in the midst of western imperial collapse that worthy Gallo-Romans would no longer hold such offices.[1] For Sidonius and countless others, the future of Gaul seemed to lie with "barbarian" kings, and by the early sixth century Italo-Romans like the young Cassiodorus Senator were in agreement, openly declaring that his generation had only *read* of a Roman Gaul and in utter disbelief.[2] By 511, however, a series of unexpected events had unfolded in the West, suddenly reuniting Italy with its long-lost Gallic province. Italy's sovereign welcomed these newly "liberated" provincials back to their ancient homeland, to the Roman Empire, and invited them to wrap themselves again in the "morals of the toga." He informed the western Senate that the Gauls had "gloriously regained Rome" and told those in Constantinople that Rome had reclaimed "her very own nurslings," the senators of Gaul.[3]

Yet this was not a solitary or confined incident; it was, in fact, a capstone to a series of rebounds and recoveries witnessed in Italy for more than a decade. Even before this consulship, Italo-Romans had been applauding the restored status of the Roman state and lauding their *princeps* as "forever Augustus" and a "propagator of the Roman name."[4] Portions of Italy, recently ravaged,

[1] Sidonius, *Ep.* 9.14.
[2] *CassOratReliquiae*, p. 466, ln. 17–20, with Chp. 9.
[3] *Variae* 2.1, 2.3, and 3.17, with Chp. 10.
[4] For *princeps*, Chp. 3. For Augustus and propagator, Fiebiger 1, #193 (*ILS* 827 and *CIL* 10 6850–2), with Chps. 3 and 10. For status, *VE* 51 and 81, and *PanTh* 5, with Chp. 1 and the Introduction to Part IV.

were said to "live again," while "unforeseen beauty" was hailed as coming forth "from the ashes of cities." Rome too, once decrepit and "slipping in her tracks," was described as youthful and her Senate's crown as "wrapped with innumerable flowers."[5] Nor was Italy the only beneficiary, as regions of the Balkans, lost in the fifth century, had been reclaimed by valiant soldiers, "returning Roman powers to their [former] limits" and making the Danube Roman again.[6] By 511, the western Roman Empire appeared to be resurging and reclaiming its rightful place. It was fitting, therefore, that the Gallic consul granting his name to this year was named Felix, "the happy one"; sentiments of a golden age had been on the lips of many, and with Gaul now restored, it seemed as if its blessings would never end.[7]

Despite all the celebration and jubilance, however, these events received little commentary outside the confines of Italy and have remained relatively obscure to this day. Moreover, to those with even a basic knowledge of late Roman or early medieval history, such anecdotes must seem bizarre. After all, the soldiers responsible for restoring Rome's lost provinces were not Romans but Ostrogoths, cousins of the same "barbarians" who infamously sacked Rome in 410 and went on to wrest portions of Gaul and Spain from the western empire. Likewise, Italy's sovereign, if afforded that title, was not a Roman *princeps* or *Augustus*, but a barbarian *rex*, a king with a hopelessly un-Roman name, Theoderic. Finally, the state to which they belonged was not the western Roman Empire. That empire had ceased to exist decades earlier, in 476, when a barbarian generalissimo named Odovacer deposed its final emperor and established a kingdom of his own. Instead, this was Ostrogothic Italy, a kingdom founded when Theoderic himself personally slew Odovacer in 493 but fated to be liberated by and restored to the real Roman Empire (the eastern or Byzantine Empire) during the reign of Justinian (527–565). How could Italo-Romans have been so mistaken? And why were they celebrating the very barbarians who, according to Romans elsewhere, had conquered them and held them in captivity?

Barbarians and Late Antiquity

"Barbarian" is a term that will acquire much complexity in the chapters that follow. Yet it is understandable why conventional "barbarians"

[5] For Italy, *VE* 141 and *PanTh* 56, with Chp. 7. For Rome, *PanTh* 56–7, with Chp. 8.
[6] For powers, *PanTh* 69, with Chp. 5; for Danube, *Variae* 11.1.10, with Chp. 2
[7] See Ennodius, *PanTh* 93, #458.10 (*In Christi Signo*), and *CassOratReliquiae*, p. 466, ln. 17–18, with Chps. 8 and 10.

like the Franks, Vandals, and Goths have dominated modern studies of the late Roman and early medieval West. Not only do Roman sources describe them as the traditional nemeses of the Roman Empire, but they also played a fundamental role in the transformations witnessed over the course of the late fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. At times they acted as the primary agents of imperial decline, sacking cities like Rome, dismantling provinces, and establishing their own kingdoms; at other times, they cast their lots with the empire and attempted to forestall its collapse. In the process and in the immediate aftermath, their impact was significant, contributing to new identities and polities that would define the societies of the early medieval West and, by extension, the modern nations of Western Europe.

Scholars generally agree on these basic points, but their interpretations of this period, emphases, and overall tones have varied greatly over the years, providing an important historiographical context and point of departure for the present study. The most traditional of narratives envision this period from the perspective of a unified Roman Empire and Roman civilization. Privileging both, they offer a crisis or conflict model, a clash of civilizations where stereotypically savage barbarians insert themselves into the Roman world by violent means, disrupt and dismantle the empire, and, at their very worst, even destroy Roman civilization.[8] Here, as might be expected, Romans appear as victims, the empire and its institutions collapse, and a decisive cultural break, often with moral implications, ushers in the Dark Ages. If there is continuity beyond the fifth century, it is dismal in comparison with the greatness of Rome.

Such "disruption" models have existed since the era of Justinian himself and have even witnessed a minirevival in recent years.[9] But the last fifty years have also provided a number of alternatives. Most broadly, the advent and popularization of a new periodization known as "late antiquity" has challenged the very idea of a decisive break between the "ancient" and "medieval" worlds, envisioning a gradual transformation beginning as early as the second century and ending as late as the ninth. Here, instead

[8] See, for instance, Musset (1965) or, most recently, Ward-Perkins (2005).

[9] For the fall of Rome in Justinian's day, Croke (1983); Goffart (2006), 51–4; and Goltz (2007). Modern understandings trace their origin to the Italian Renaissance, when terms like "Dark Ages" and "Middle Ages" were first coined, and by extension to the European Enlightenment, which privileged (classical) reason over (medieval) superstition and viewed human history in terms of progress. Gibbon's monumental *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), the product of Enlightenment thinking, continues, both directly and indirectly, to influence. See Pocock (2003). For the recent revival, Ward-Perkins (2005) and, less negatively, Heather (2006).

of high politics, cultural, religious, and intellectual histories are the norm, while the traditional boundaries of the Roman Empire are often eschewed in favor of micro- and macroregions that focus on a particular province or community or extend broadly from the Mediterranean to places as distant as the Indus or Scandinavia.[10]

Not surprisingly, so dynamic a way of imagining the late ancient and early medieval worlds has had an impact on accounts of barbarians and the fall of Rome, and many new paradigms have emerged.[11] Some of the most radical have simply replaced traditionally Romanocentric approaches with an emphasis on barbarians and barbarian kingdoms. Studies of this sort have endeavored to "liberate the barbarians" from what is seen as unfair Roman and modern biases, attempting to study these peoples in their own right and on their own terms. Members of the so-called Vienna School, for example, have utilized ethnogenesis theory in an effort to shed further light on barbarian origins, investigating the process whereby once-disparate tribes coalesced and formed into the larger confederacies of late antiquity. In their view, ethnogenesis informed and created the "tribal" memories and identities of peoples like the Franks and Theoderic's Goths, memories and identities that accompanied them when they entered Roman soil and contributed to the new, "national" identities of early medieval Europe. Ethnogenesis, in other words, transformed barbarians and Romans, forging a new world order.[12]

Other scholars, while still privileging barbarian ethnicity or identity, have criticized ethnogenesis models, both questioning the written sources that are used as evidence for tribal memory and accusing modern advocates of having nationalistic motives of their own.[13] These scholars propose, instead, that the barbarians of late antiquity were the products of the Roman frontier and a mixed Romano-barbarian military aristocracy. They treat the frontier as a broad zone, imagining that it fostered interaction, cooperation, and even synthesis between "barbarians" and "Romans" long before the political transformations of

[10] Brown's *The World of Late Antiquity* (1971) remains a standard point of departure. Shorter and more recent introductions can be found in Bowersock et al. (1999), vii–xiii; Brown (2003), 1–33; James (2008); Marcone (2008); and Clark (2011). For a critique, Ward-Perkins (2005), 169f.

[11] For recent discussions, Pohl (1997), 1–12, and (1998a), 1–15; and Mathisen and Shanzer (2011), 1–11.

[12] The classic work is Wenskus (1961). Wolfram, Pohl, and Geary are more recent representatives of this school of thought, Geary (2002) being especially useful for novices. See also the essays in Wolfram et al. (1990). For a critique, see the following note.

[13] See, most recently, Goffart (2006) and the collection of essays in Gillett (2002). Gillett (2006) provides a useful and accessible introduction for those unfamiliar with the debate.

the fifth century.[14] In their view, the arrival of the barbarians had clear political repercussions, but the cultural seeds of the Middle Ages had already been sown.

A final model, more Romanocentric in its approach, has emphasized accommodation. Here, scholars have focused on either the legal and constitutional mechanisms that allowed for barbarian rule in the West or the sociocultural mechanisms that provided Roman elites with alternatives to Romanness and Roman political rule. Such legal and constitutional analyses often stress the ordered settlement of barbarians on Roman soil, challenging models of "disruption" and demonstrating greater and lesser degrees of political continuity within the barbarian kingdoms.[15] The sociocultural analyses, on the other hand, tend to focus on the reactions of individual Romans to the advent of the barbarians. Here, fifth-century Gaul frequently serves as the model, with Gallo-Roman elites like Sidonius Apollinaris gradually becoming "post-Roman" and then "medieval" through mass exodus to the church or (less frequently) by holding offices in barbarian regimes.[16] Accommodation, in short, eases the fifth-century West into the Middle Ages, while still allowing for a degree of crisis and disruption.

From Ostrogothic Italy to Roman Restoration

In general, the scholarship dealing with Ostrogothic Italy, the barbarian kingdom that will be the focus of this book, has fit within the interpretive schemes just discussed. Those interested in disruption models have emphasized the otherness and "barbarian" status of Theoderic and his Goths, or pointed toward "un-Roman" activities within the Ostrogothic kingdom.[17] Those interested in understanding the Ostrogoths on their own terms have relied on ethnogenesis or frontier models, both benefiting

[14] For this view of the frontier, Whittaker (1994) and Burns (2003). For the military aristocracy, Demandt (1989) and Goffart (2006), 188–92.

[15] For legal settlement based on taxation, Goffart (1980) and (2006), chp. 6. For constitutionality, Barnwell (1992). Both treat developments in the West broadly.

[16] The classic treatment is Stroheker (1948), which focuses primarily on the lay aristocracy. More recent works, such as Van Dam (1985) and (1993) and Mathisen (1993), have emphasized the Christianization of Gallo-Roman society. The collected essays in Drinkwater and Elton (1992) and Mathisen and Shanzer (2001) utilize both approaches.

[17] Cf. MacPherson (1989) and Ward-Perkins (2005), 72f.

from studies in disciplines like archaeology and linguistics;[18] or, rather differently, they have challenged the very idea of Gothicness, suggesting that in the Ostrogothic kingdom "Goths" and "Romans" were merely ideological constructs that served propagandistic purposes.[19] Finally, those interested in accommodation narratives have explored a number of topics, including the legal mechanisms of Gothic settlement in Italy, the constitutional position of Theoderic vis-à-vis Constantinople, and the collaboration of the senatorial aristocracy with the Ostrogothic regime.[20] A recent proliferation of studies treating contemporary authors and their works, moreover, has granted greater insight into the reactions of certain individuals at this time.[21]

Such developments would seem to suggest that a synthesis is warranted, but this is not the purpose of this book. Indeed, though the present study is informed by the preceding models and subscribes to a late antique view, its purpose is to take the fields of "Ostrogothic Italy" and "barbarian studies" in an entirely different direction by suggesting a new type of accommodation model. Set within the context of Roman imperial decline and the emergence of "barbarian kingdoms," this book is unapologetically "Roman," "Italo-Roman" to be more specific, in its orientation. It is not, therefore, a history of Ostrogothic Italy or the Goths, but a study of

[18] Cf. Burns (1984); Wolfram (1988); and Heather (1996); as well as the topical essays collected in *Teoderico il Grande e i Goti d'Italia* (1993); Bierbrauer et al. (1994); Carile (1995); and Barnish and Marazzi (2007).

[19] For this thesis, see especially Amory (1997). For a recent critique, Heather (2007). Cf. Goffart (1988), part 2, and (2006), chp. 4, who argues for a similar kind of propagandistic construction of Gothicness in the eastern Roman Empire.

[20] For the argument that the Goths were given tax revenues rather than land, Goffart (1980), chp. 3. For critiques, Barnish (1986) and Heather (2007). See also Chp. 7 of this study. The literature on Theoderic's constitutional position is vast, much of it cited in Chp. 3. For collaboration, Momigliano (1955); Moorhead (1978a); O'Donnell (1981); Barnish (1988); and Giardina (1993).

[21] The most important of these individuals are Cassiodorus and Ennodius. The former has received much more attention than the latter. For recent studies, O'Donnell (1979) and the collected essays in Leanza (1986). The partial translations of Cassiodorus' *Variae* found in Barnish (1992) likewise provide a needed alternative to the useful, but ultimately unsatisfying summations of Hodgkin (1886), which continue to be cited in modern works as if accurate translations. More recently, studies of Ennodius have also flowered, though most not in English. Kennell (2000); the proceedings of the *Atti della Giornata Ennodiana* (2001–6); and Schröder (2007) can now be consulted for treatments of his life and works. With respect to his *Life of Epiphanius*, an Italian translation with commentary superior to that of Cook (1942) is now available in Cesa (1988). Ennodius' extremely important *Panegyric to King Theoderic* now has two newer editions in the works of Rohr (1995) and Rota (2002), both of which include translations and extensive commentary in German and Italian, respectively. Finally, his letters are becoming available in French via the Budé editions of Gioanni (2006–10).

Romanness and the Roman Empire that fully accepts Theoderic's reign (489/93–526) as a continuation of Roman history. It does not, then, like the teleological models discussed previously, look forward to the medieval future and attempt to explain the transition from antiquity to the Middle Ages. Instead, its chronological scope is far narrower and it looks backward to the Roman past, immediate and distant, in an attempt to explain the continuities and changes, all overwhelmingly Roman and imperial in nature, of the Theoderican era.

One of its principal purposes, therefore, is to complicate quite considerably notions of "barbarian" and "Roman" during this period, providing new models for the understanding of both and demonstrating in the process how Theoderic and his Goths found acceptance as "Romans." Another purpose, in keeping with the first, is to draw attention to the full extent to which the "Ostrogothic" state presented itself and was perceived by its own inhabitants as the western Roman Empire. "Ostrogothic Italy," this study claims, is a misnomer, an unfortunate but convenient inaccuracy that renders "barbarian" an Italy that remained proudly Roman in its self-identification, regardless of external perceptions. Finally, a third underlying purpose is to demonstrate that Theoderic and his Goths not only fit within these understandings of Romanness and a Roman Empire, but were also essential to it, their unique roles contributing to the contemporary beliefs of imperial resurgence, blessedness, and a golden age already encountered earlier. Theoderic's Italy, then, was not a mistake; nor were the Romans of Italy yearning to be liberated by the only real Roman Empire, based in Constantinople. It was a true Roman Empire that presented itself as such and exceeded the expectations of many of its Roman inhabitants; and it would have persisted in its Roman identity, had it not been for the unforeseeable intervention of the east Roman state.[22]

The book itself is divided into five parts, each with two chapters, and addresses these ideas both diachronically and thematically. Part I introduces Magnus Felix Ennodius and Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator, two Italo-Romans whose sentiments remain paramount throughout this study. It focuses on their respective backgrounds and impressions of the fifth-century "decline and fall" of the western empire, the role of "barbarians" and "Romans" in the process, and their shared understanding that the empire persisted, despite the deposition of its emperor in 476. Part II shifts away from a purely Ennodian or Cassiodorean reading, examining the highly traditional mechanisms that allowed Theoderic to fit within the idea of a revived and resurging Roman Empire. It investigates his position

[22] Cf. Sirago (1986), 198; Schäfer (2001), 196–7; and O'Donnell (2008).

as the independent ruler of the West, the titles and epithets that he used and had applied to him by his subjects, and his regular employment of imperial iconography and regalia. It suggests that Italo-Romans wanted their own emperor, a *princeps* reminiscent of Augustus or Trajan, and concludes that Theoderic conformed to their expectations. Part III addresses the issue of "Gothicness" in Theoderic's realm, demonstrating how Goths were transformed into civilized defenders and avengers of the Roman Empire and how Theoderic's uniquely royal and east Roman credentials served to legitimize him as a proper imperial successor. Part IV focuses on the positive changes that Italo-Romans witnessed at home during the long reign of Theoderic, acts of benefaction that contributed heavily to contemporary sentiments of blessedness and a golden age. It demonstrates that the celebratory language of the day was not empty rhetoric, and using case studies from Liguria, the city of Rome, and other Italian regions, it draws attention to how sound leadership and needful patronage could validate "Gothic" imperial succession at a local level. Part V, finally, complements Part IV by looking at the positive changes that Italo-Romans (and others) witnessed in matters abroad. It focuses on the role of non-Italian lands in Theoderic's Roman Empire, using Gaul, a region for which there is abundant evidence, as an extensive case study. It treats Gaul's complex historical relationship with Italy; Italian perceptions of Gallic continuity, captivity, and barbarization in the aftermath of Roman rule; and the intervention of the Theoderican regime, which ultimately led to a Gallic restoration and the consulship of Felix.

Part V thus concludes where the Introduction begins: with the "happy year" (*felix annus*) of the consul Felix, an event that was emblematic of the wonders of the Theoderican era and the proudly Roman identity of "Ostrogothic Italy." To some, however, this may seem a strange place to end the account. After all, Theoderic continued to rule until his death in 526, while his empire persisted without him, and in various incarnations, until its final "reconquest" by the armies of Justinian in 555. An Epilogue, therefore, follows the final chapter of this book, providing a rationale and tying up some proverbial loose ends. Most studies of Ostrogothic Italy conclude with a discussion of its doomed future, seeing the final years of Theoderic's reign as the beginning of the end. But in 511, and even as Justinian's armies were marching on Ravenna, the Roman past, which now included Theoderic and his Goths, continued to inform Italy's present, while Italy's future remained unknown.

PART I

AN EMPIRE TURNED UPSIDE-DOWN

A Shadow Empire

Rome did not fall in a day.[1] It took the better part of a century, and, indeed, the Gallo-Roman perspective on this process is well documented, not least owing to the survival of fifth-century works by "representative men" like Sidonius Apollinaris.[2] In Gaul, Roman aristocrats like Sidonius watched as barbarian Visigoths and Burgundians slowly whittled away at those enclaves still claimed by the Roman Empire. They continued to participate in the imperial administration, to be staunchly "Roman," and to hope for imperial resurgence into the twilight of Roman rule. Though eventually resigning themselves to their lots and adapting, many nonetheless expressed horror and disbelief when the crumbling western empire, reduced to Italy, finally abandoned them.[3] How exactly the Roman inhabitants of Italy reacted to this situation, on the other hand, is difficult to ascertain. Surely, if Gallo-Romans could feel betrayed, Italo-Romans must not have felt much better. Italy, the ideological heartland of the Roman Empire, had witnessed disappointments of its own: barbarian invasions, internal strife and civil wars, and finally the loss and even willful abandonment of long-held provinces like Gaul. Though the central administration endeavored to reassert itself, it was ultimately unable. Developments like these must have been shocking and humiliating to contemporary Italo-

[1] In fact, it will be suggested in Part I that Rome never fell, at least as far as certain Italo-Romans were concerned.

[2] Treatments of fifth-century Gaul rely heavily on Sidonius' works. See, among others, Stroheker (1948); Van Dam (1985); Mathisen (1993); and Harries (1994).

[3] Sidonius, *Ep.* 7.7 provides an excellent example. On the "crisis" and reaction of the Gallo-Roman aristocracy in general, see Mathisen (1993) and the collected essays in Drinkwater and Elton (1992).

Romans, yet a "representative man" like Sidonius fails to shed light on the matter, ushering in Italy's "dark ages" with blackening silence.[4]

This long silence, however, is soundly broken by a number of important individuals who emerge from the shadows at the turn of the sixth century. Classically trained and traditionally elite in outlook, these men were heirs to Rome's grievous past and direct beneficiaries of its present fortunes. More than simply living through change, they were molded by it, enthusiastically celebrating the tidings of Theoderic's reign and looking forward to a bright future. Most noteworthy among them were Magnus Felix Ennodius, a north Italian churchman, and his younger contemporary, Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator, a southern Italian bureaucrat. Their collective writings are extensive, and though their ornate styles have often befuddled even the best of Latinists,[5] their works provide invaluable evidence for Italian sentiments at this time.

Here, in the two chapters that follow, their individual backgrounds and perspectives on the past will be treated in an effort to understand contemporary enthusiasm for Theoderican rule. Though from opposite ends of the Italian Peninsula, following dissimilar career paths, and writing for different audiences and with different purposes in mind, Ennodius and Cassiodorus agreed on much. Imperial leadership had failed during the fifth century; provinces had been lost, and not just to stereotypically savage barbarians but also to an increasingly rapacious eastern Roman Empire; and amid the chaos, Roman society had begun to decay. Within this milieu of decline, Romanness, according to them, became negotiable, a factor that allowed fifth-century "barbarians" to appear at times more Roman than certain "Greek" emperors dispatched from Constantinople. Finally, and despite these calamities, both Ennodius and Cassiodorus agreed on a fundamental point: 476, the traditional date for the fall of the western empire, was meaningless. Odovacer's position may have been ambiguous, but his realm was not. There was still a western Roman Empire, separate from its eastern counterpart, and, according to these two Italo-Romans, it waited for a proper Roman emperor to rule it.

[4] Granted, this period in Italian history is not without its evidence, but what does exist is rather sparse in nature, composed mostly of short inscriptions, coins, and chronicle entries. Compared to the plethora of literary sources from contemporary Gaul, many of a deeply personal nature, Italy truly is bleak. Still, "dark ages" is a term used here for ironic and rhetorical effect. The evidence for Italo-Roman sentiments during the late fourth and early fifth centuries, on the other hand, is more substantial. See, for instance, Paschoud (1967).

[5] Ennodius' style may explain why his works (with few exceptions) never gained much popularity in the Middle Ages and, indeed, continue to be overlooked. See Rohr (1994), 95–6 and (1999), 261–2, who comments on the twelfth-century assertion of Arnulf of Lisieux that Ennodius was really Innodius: "the entangled knot."